

Mad Jack & The Black Label Boys

August, 1975. A group of friends from the Twin Cities have gathered at the Old Time Fiddle and Country Music Contest at Brownville, NE. Pop Wagner, Bob Douglas, Maureen McElderry, Tim Hennesy and Bob Bovee all entered various contests: singing, guitar, fiddle. Then the idea came up of putting a group together for the band contest. Names were kicked around, like Cheap Trills or Hap Hazard & the Fly-By-Night Ramblers, and finally, as the bottle of Jack Daniels passed around, Mad Jack and the Black Label Boys.

Douglas, Bovee and Wagner, along with Kansas fiddler Greg Allen, practiced a few tunes, got into the finals leading all the bands, and ended up with a disappointing fourth place. Still, it was inspiration enough to start a real band, a three-piece with Douglas on mandolin, guitar, banjo and spoons, Wagner on guitar and fiddle, Bovee on guitar, harmonica, banjo and autoharp, and all on vocals.

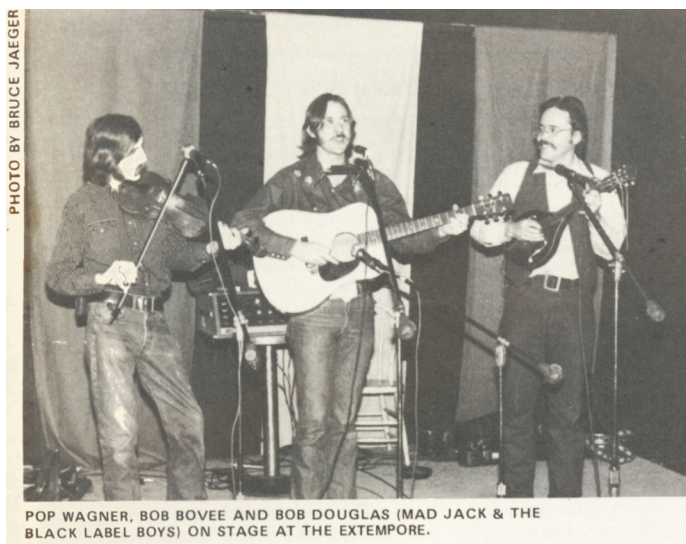
Late that fall Mary DuShane, who had been living in Ohio for a few years, returned to Minnesota and was immediately asked to add her fiddle, autoharp and vocal expertise to the mix. And then we were off on the road! Besides MN and WI shows, February found Mad Jack performing in Kansas, Missouri and Iowa; in March and April it was Idaho, Washington and British Columbia.

Summer 1976 was the first Mad Jack tour of Germany with Pop and Bob D. picking up Matt Haney as the third member of the band. When the band regrouped in the fall of 1976 (Bovee, Douglas, Wagner, DuShane), more touring brought shows in Illinois, Wyoming, Idaho, Washington, Oregon and Utah. For gigs close to home, if one of the members couldn't make it, Matt Haney or Dick Rees might sit in.

Making a living with old time music may have been the most fun anyone could think of, but it wasn't much of a living. By 1977 the band started doing only occasional performances together. However, Mad Jack with Pop, Bob B. and Matt did tours of Germany and Switzerland, a total of 41 shows in 60 days in 1978 and 30 shows in 30 days in 1979. The band also made its mark on the dance scene in the Twin Cities. In October, 1979 Bovee, Wagner and Haney, with the encouragement of Gail Heil who moved to Minneapolis two weeks later and also performed a few times under the Mad Jack banner, started the Monday Night Square Dance. Both Mad Jack and the Square Dance helped foster the development of the old time scene in Minnesota that has spawned such a wealth of old time bands and dances.



No Mad Jack recording was ever released, although the album "Pop Wagner & Bob Bovee" included five tracks with the whole band. The repertoire of the band was thoroughly eclectic, so much so that some might not be willing to call it an "old time" band. Healthy doses of Carter Family, Charlie Poole, Uncle Dave Macon were spiced with Bessie Smith blues, Cajun numbers, jug band novelties, original songs, Irish tunes and more modern country, all done in the old time way.



POP WAGNER, BOB BOVEE AND BOB DOUGLAS (MAD JACK & THE BLACK LABEL BOYS) ON STAGE AT THE EXTEMPORE.

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